2011

Development, Implementation and Analysis of a Project-Based Model In a Special Education Setting

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

Augsburg College

Minneapolis, MN

2011

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION
AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Leadership Application Project of **Joel Dimock** has been approved by the Review Committee, and fulfills the requirements for the Master of Arts in Education degree.

Date of Oral Defense: October 17, 2011

Date Completed: 10/17/11

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ABSTRACT

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Leadership Application Project (EDC 585)

Project-based learning is becoming a more common practice in schools around America, particularly small independently operated charter schools such as Learning for Leadership. Learning for Leadership Charter School (LLCS) is a project-based charter school in urban Minneapolis with a mission of delivering a project-based approach to learning compared to a more traditional direct instruction approach. LLCS does not uniformly deliver a consistent model of project-based learning through its various grade levels. Through extensive research of literature, a preliminary project-based model was developed and tested in a small group special education setting. From this experience, along with input from professionals and in-depth analysis, a revised model has been developed for teachers to use within all grade levels at LLCS. This paper investigates the research surrounding project-based learning and offers a view inside the development of a project-based model and its implications in the classroom.

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Acknowledgments

I'd first and foremost like to thank my family for all of their support through this process. They've been my encouragement, motivation and even my editors (thanks Dad). Thanks to my wife, Rachel, for always keeping me focused. Your love and support have provided me with everything I could have asked for in life. To my son, Sawyer, your goofy little smile reminds me what life is about every time I see it.

A special thanks goes to Diane Vodicka from the Augsburg Education Department. She always challenged me, every step of the way. That challenge led to persistence and this journey has taught me a lot about myself. Thanks Dee for helping me create a product I feel good about and for helping me become a stronger person throughout the process.

I would also like to thank my two readers, Elizabeth Ankeny and Andrea Martin. Your willingness and time I am truly grateful for.

Lastly, I must thank everyone involved at Learning for Leadership Charter School, particularly, Stephanie Dess for allowing me innumerable opportunities to flourish as a young educator. These experiences will have a lasting impact on my career. Thank you for your trust in me.

Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Learning for Leadership Charter School (LLCS), located in Northeast Minneapolis, is a K-12 public charter school that serves 190 students. The 2010-11 school year marked the school's 5th year of operation. What makes LLCS unique from other public charter schools is its emphasis on the delivery of project-based learning. Project-based learning can generally be defined as a teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and life skills through long term inquiry process which is structured around a set of guiding questions and a thoughtfully designed plan. Through this approach, LLCS has intentions of serving a diverse student population; 85% of the students receive free and reduced lunch and 20% qualify for special education.

As with any new school, LLCS has had its fair share of challenges. In the beginning the school simply didn't have enough space to accommodate all the students. During the third year of operations LLCS was able to expand substantially to accommodate the students. With each new school year the staff faced new trials and tribulations. Each year has been a learning process for LLCS, whose staff continually address these challenges in efforts to better serve the student population. As the logistical issues of day-to-day operations were being met, there came a point where the component of project-based learning needed to be addressed. After three and a half years of operation, there continued to be little structure when implementing this LLCS philosophy. Each teacher seemed to have his or her own ideas as to what it pertained, leading to different methodologies when implementing project-based learning. This problem has created a sense of instability and confusion for the students. It is my intent,

through the means of the Leadership Application Project, to design and implement a concrete, consistent model of project-based learning at LLCS that will enhance the quality of education provided for students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review includes an analysis of research, based on my own investigation of project-based learning. It is broken into five sections that pertain to the relevance of my project in addressing the problem. The first section, Features of Project-Based Learning, detailes what project-based learning is and provides insight into the origins of this learning concept. The next section of the literature review, Planning and Assessment, reviews research that covers a variety of project-based components such as design, facilitation, and assessment procedures of project-based learning in the classroom. The third section, Comparing Models of Teaching, reviews research that was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the project-based instruction as it compares to the more traditional teaching method, direct instruction. The fourth section, Student Learning Variables, analyzes the effectiveness of project-based instruction as it pertains to student conditions that are similar to students LLCS serves, such as low student motivation, socioeconomically disadvantaged families, and serving a high population of special education students. The final section, Challenges Facing Project-Based Learning, gives a broader perspective of difficulties that teachers will face when implementing project-based learning.

The literature highlighted limitations and successes of project-based curriculums that have been practiced. Much of the research appeared to be limited when considering the context of special education, the area of my inquiry. The research within the literature review covered a wide variety of project-based programs.

Features of Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning has its roots in the constructivist education movement. Constructivism is the common term used to describe the process in which participants construct their own learning experiences towards achieving a common interest. John Dewey, often considered the founder of constructivism, advocated that children's natural curiosity should be their true motivation for education. Dewey summarized the role of a teacher as someone who guides and facilitates each learner's unique interests while nurturing their curiosity (Oxford, 1997). Jean Piaget expanded on Dewey's philosophy incorporating social cognition into the learning process. Piaget stated that biological development happens through organization and adaptation to environments, thus creating the idea that the same occurs for cognitive development (Piaget, 1977). Translated, Piaget's interpretation of constructivism stated that each individual should create their own learning experiences based on their perceptions of their individual environments. The ideology behind project-based learning allows the learner to organize their own understanding based on their unique environment and inquiry process.

According to the Buck Institute for Education (BIE), the bulk of the research that contributes to our understanding of Project-Based Learning has come forth in the last 40 years (Buck Institute for Education, 2010). BIE, a leader in the project-based initiative, defines project-based learning as "a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks" (Markham, Larmer, & Ravitz, 2003; www.bie.org).

Project Foundry, a company providing computer software for project-based learning initiatives, estimates that of 111,164 K-12 schools in America, 9,000 of these schools use project-based learning in their classrooms. Considering these numbers, approximately 8% of schools in America utilize project-based learning in their classrooms (Johnson, 2007).

One way that constructivism is evidenced in today's classrooms is through project-based learning. According to Brooks and Brooks (1999), proponents for the inclusion of project-based learning in the classroom state that project-based learning incorporates several key constructivist ideologies:

- Freeing students from fact-driven curriculums and allowing them to focus on larger ideas.
- Providing the opportunity for the students to follow trails of interest and reach their own unique conclusions.
- Sharing with students that the world is a complex place in which multiple perspectives exist and that truth is left to one's own interpretation.
- The process of assessing learning is not always clear and there are multiple methods that can be effective.

In describing the features of project-based learning the authors Krajcik, Blumenfel, Marx, and Soloway (1994) state five important features found in project-based learning:

1.) A driving question or problem that sets the scene for the project.

2.) Student construction of an artifact and presentation to a non-classroom audience.

3.) Student collaborative research often over an extended period of time.

4.) Community of inquiry.

5.) Use of technology-based cognitive and communication tools.

In another study, Clark (2006) builds upon the ideas of Krajcik et al. (1994) stating that students need to elaborate further, using a more scientific approach in developing questions about the topic, followed by making predictions about possible answers to the question. Once the predictions have been conceptualized, Clark states that students should develop ways to test their hypothesis and then solve problems through trial and error. The process should be negotiated with the teacher and is often referred to as the Negotiated Project Approach. This approach creates an avenue for the teacher to incorporate children's interests into teaching and learning rather than having the children's interests solely dictate what standards will be met (Folger, Mitchell, Rathkey, Wetzel, 2008).

Planning and Assessing Project-Based Learning

Viner and Sylvester (2003) designed and implemented project-based learning for the areas of science and mathematics. After many endeavors, the authors of the study identified areas in which they would have approached their project-based initiative differently based on their classroom practice with project-based learning. It was reported through observations and trials that when designing project-based lessons instructors

needed to account for various factors that commonly occurred such as scheduling, unforeseen timing variables and other classroom work requirements. Viner and Sylvester stated that many adjustments needed to be made for time, interpersonal relationships, and student engagement; initially, modeling and scaffolding, a guided process where the teacher models the learning, followed by the students and teacher practicing the learning together, and lastly students completing the learning alone, were not used by the researchers because they didn't want to limit the students' learning and ultimately their final products. Eventually, however, Viner and Sylvester concluded that modeling and scaffolding are a necessity for proper design and implementation of project-based learning. Students need a solid foundation of knowledge before they can effectively dig deeper into the learning process. Observation and reflection by Viner and Sylvester indicated that it takes time for students to transition from the traditional learning environment into the project-based learning environment. It was noted that the more the students practice freedom in learning, the better they become at engaging in the process independently (Viner & Sylevester).

Teaching, in the classical sense, is often instructor-driven and often requires students to perform tasks in their seats. Successful project-based teachers have stated that this methodology of teaching is ineffective when considering a project-based classroom. Research conducted by Evertson, Neal and Randolph (2003) stated there were indirect ways, outside of direct instruction, to control students and instructional events, as well as educational outcomes. Mergendoller (2009) suggested that teachers who practice project-based learning in their classrooms typically look more like a student, learning with the community and facilitating an engaging environment.

In a survey conducted by Thomas, Mergendoller & Michaelson (1999) 50 teachers were interviewed who had implemented one or more projects within a secondary setting. The investigation focused on certain conditions associated with successful implementation of project work. Four separate themes of successful project-based learning emerged: Time Management, Getting Started, Establishing a Culture that Stresses Student Self-Management, and Managing Student Groups. Each theme then contained sub-themes that offer advice to teachers practicing project-based learning. Examples included learning how to make scheduling decisions for a student when they need more time, to taking advantage of time where you can directly teach students how to learn (Thomas, Mergendoller & Michaelson, 1999).

Viner and Sylvestor (2003) stated that assessments are an essential component of project-based learning and need to take place at many points, by different people, throughout the project process. According to their study, students performed better when the final artifact was being graded or judged by an outside audience. By using an outside assessor, the performance of the students went up. Also found to be invaluable was the practice of including students into the grading process as a means to create buy-in for the students. Lastly, Viner and Sylvester observed that the more real world relevance the projects had, the better the students performed and the more interest they had in the projects.

In addition to Viner and Sylvester (2003), research conducted in The Rural Trust Study (2001), Assessing Student Understanding, suggested the importance of creating a comprehensive picture of how student work shows progress over time. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) emphasized the importance of multiple assessments; suggesting that it

should not just be a desired component, but an imperative piece of the project and the learning process. They asserted that the assessments should happen often and can take place in many different forms. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) stated that assessments should be both formal and informal and can often take place through conversations, journaling, testing, self assessments and performance based measures.

The National Research Council (1995) emphasized that student involvement during the assessment process helped them to become part of a community of learners and that they should participate in constructively critiquing their peers. A study completed by Erickson and Lehrer (1998) stated that over a multi-year period, middle school students developed a deeper understanding of what constituted good research and made for better presentations by observing past projects. The research, which correlated well with National Research Council findings, suggested that students performed better when they knew what others have done. This research ties into Viner and Sylvester's (2003) findings that modeling, scaffolding, and the use of direct instruction methodologies into the classroom doesn't, in fact, limit students, but can essentially create a better product in the end. Erickson and Lehrer concluded that having students assess other projects that are similar in nature to their projects helped in creating a more successful final product.

Comparing Models of Teaching

Researchers have compared more traditional approaches to teaching, such as lecture-based/direct instruction, and the project-based approach. The studies offer evidence on both sides supporting and rejecting the effectiveness of project-based

learning in the classroom. Allan Sterbinsky of the Center for Research in Educational Policy compared the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning, a project-based school, with its four feeder districts: Denver, Cherry Creek, Douglas County and Littleton (Sterbinsky, 2002). The comparisons were based on standardized tests mandated by the state of Colorado. For this study, the results were based on test results from 1998-2001. The researcher compared achievement mean scores from the project-based school to that of four other schools that didn't use project-based instruction. The results of the study showed the project-based schools overall achievement mean (across reading, writing, math, and science) of 58.13 compared to a 51.9 for the four district schools. These results indicated that 58.13% of the students working in the project-based environment reached or exceeded proficiency while 51.9% of students from the traditional school settings reached or exceeded proficiency (Johnson, 2007).

In another study, Ward and Lee (2004) hypothesized that there would not be a significant difference in content achievement tests between the project-based instruction and the lecture-based instruction learning models. The subjects in this study were 79 ninth through twelfth graders enrolled in a Foods and Nutrition class. The students were randomly split into two groups, one group practicing project-based learning and the other practicing the lecture-based approach. Results suggested that the two tests groups had no significant differences in achievement (Ward & Lee, 2004).

According to research conducted by Boaler (1997), project-based learning appeared to be equivalent or slightly more effective than other models of instruction when considering overall gains in academic achievement for developing lower-level cognitive skills in traditional subject matter areas. Boaler (1997) also stated that there is

evidence that project based learning is an effective method for teaching complex processes such as planning, communicating, problem solving and decision making.

Grossen (2004) studied the success of a traditional, direct instruction, approach that is frequently used in special education. The study examined a program called Corrective Reading with secondary students considered to be high-risk. Corrective Reading is designed to provide students with a direct, highly scripted curriculum that can initiate reading gains with otherwise struggling readers. Results from the study indicated positive gains by all students participating in the study. Grossen indicated that the effective components that helped attribute to the success of the program were: training, in-class coaching, and progress monitoring. Grossen's study indicates that direct instruction, when administered correctly, can create successful learning environments for students struggling in school.

Steele (2005) reviewed research to analyze whether a constructivist approach, such as project-based learning, or a behaviorist approach, such as direct instruction, is preferable when educating students in special education. The author stated that most educators have a preference for one approach or the other, generally not both. In a review of the literature, Steele concluded that the best teaching incorporated methodologies from both constructivism and behaviorism, basing instructional decisions on student learning characteristics and needs.

Mercer and Mercer (2005) compared explicit instruction, such as direct instruction, and implicit instruction, such as project-based learning. The authors stated, similar to Steele (2005), that educators tend to deliver one particular method under the assumption that if it is implemented correctly that all students will have the ability to

succeed. Mercer and Mercer (2005) concluded that by combing both explicit and implicit teaching methodologies, teachers will have created an optimal learning environment for all students. The authors used the term 'Interactive Instruction' for the combined approach, incorporating both explicit and implicit instruction.

Much of the research behind project-based learning was divided. A conclusion could be drawn that project-based learning is, at times, better than direct instruction and, at times, worse than the more explicit approaches. Further research will increase understanding when considering the effectiveness of the two approaches.

Student Learning Variables

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of project-based learning with students who are over-represented in low achieving schools or who traditionally struggle in schools, such as students of color, students with low motivation and students with disabilities. In a study conducted by Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, (ELOB, 1999) eighth grade students in an inner-city school who took part in Expeditionary Learning, a type of project-based learning that encourages learning to happen in the community, ranked second in the district on a standardized reading assessment. Similarly, elementary aged students, after practicing Expeditionary Learning, placed 11th in mathematics and 17th in reading out of 76 schools. Hispanics made up 59% of the school population while African Americans made up 27% of the overall student population. Findings from the study indicate that students who were given opportunities to experience project-based learning had a higher rate of success (ELOB, 1999).

In another study, Bartscher, Gould, and Nutter (1995) analyzed the effect of project-based learning on third, fifth, and tenth grade students identified as having low motivation or difficulty handing their assignments and homework in on time. The research was conducted mainly through teacher and student questioning as well as through teacher journaling. The study concluded that 82% of the students agreed that the projects helped motivate them, while 93% of students indicated increased interest in the topics involved. Lastly, the results indicated a 7% increase in homework completion that could be attributed to the project work. Students reported that motivation significantly rose when speakers were utilized and field trips took place. One hundred percent of third graders, 87% of sixth graders, and 97% of tenth graders thought that field trips and speaking engagements increased their motivation towards learning. Regarding this study project-based learning had the potential to increase motivation, increase interest and show positive benefits for students (Bartscher, Gould, & Nutter).

Research conducted by Bower (1998) found that many non-traditional teaching strategies are effective in teaching students with short attention spans. Bower suggested that alternative instructional approaches such as hands-on projects, allowing students to work at their own pace, offering frequent breaks and opportunities to move around could be effective strategies to use when considering students of varying needs. Despite the research, Glass (1999) reported that 43% of teachers don't typically incorporate any of the non-traditional strategies into their classrooms, mainly because they feel it doesn't benefit the class as a whole. Ten percent of the teachers surveyed didn't use alternative teaching strategies because the strategies had never been made known to them. Additionally, teachers reported a lack of time to allow for the diverse strategies that

Bower stated are essential in educating students with special needs (Glass). Project-based learning is relevant to the unique needs of students with disabilities because it offers the use of multiple teaching strategies within a structure that allows for cross-curricular approaches, an approach that isn't widely being used in classrooms (Glass).

A case could be made that the lack of effective teaching strategies for students with emotional behavior disorders (EBD) leads to poor academic outcomes. This lack of strategy implementation could correlate with Reid's findings (2004), which stated that 75% of students with EBD scored below the 25th percentile of overall academic achievement. Furthermore, according to data from the United States Department of Education (2002), only 40% of adolescents with emotional disorders graduate with a diploma. About half of students with emotional disorders are unemployed and those who are employed are typically earning a low paying wage (Cheney & Bullis, 2004; Wagner, 1995).

Another component at the core of project-based learning is student choice. Kern, Mantegna, Vorndran, Bailin, Hilt (2001) analyzed the effects of offering choice in the classroom and determined that students with EBD will decrease inappropriate behaviors and increase task engagement with increased choice options. Kern et al. also suggest that choice increases motivation across the entire spectrum of learners.

In an analysis of alternative education strategies, Tobin and Sprague (2000) indicated that a number of classroom strategies influence the success of students with EBD. Many strategies identified within the research align with strategies found in project-based learning. Some of the instructional methodologies recommended, which also coincide with strategies prevalent in project based learning include:

- Social skills groups
- Parent involvement
- Structured classrooms
- Incorporating mentors into the classroom
- One-to-one instruction

Much of the research about education as it pertains to students with EBD focuses on individual strategies and techniques that are applicable in different settings. There is relatively little research that suggests a particular educational framework, such as project-based learning, and the effectiveness of implementation of project-based learning when used in conjunction with EBD settings. This is an area that lacks substantial research. Alternative education programs incorporate many components of project-based learning and have proven successful for students with EBD, but there is a lack of cohesion in the use of effective practices and each strategy is often practiced separate of one another, not in conjunction with one another (Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

Challenges facing Project-Based Learning

Edelson, Gordon and Pea (1999) conducted a study that addressed common constraints that have been known to limit the effectiveness of project-based learning in some environments. It was found that these constraints include fixed and inadequate resources, inflexible schedules, and incompatible technology. According to Blumenfeld, Krajcik, Marx, & Solloway (1994), research indicated that class size and composition, as well as district curricular policies often interfere with the success of project-based learning.

Blumenfeld, Krajcik, Marx, & Soloway (1994) reported on problems, related to project-based instruction, identified by teachers who were experienced in implementation. One prevalent theme presented by researchers was that projects often get off-track with teachers and students pursuing questions that are not relevant to the overall goal. Blumenfeld et al. stated that to counter the problems, goals must be learner appropriate and the projects must center on the goal. One suggestion the authors provide is for teachers to develop the driving questions that help students achieve their goal.

In another study, Achilles and Hoover (1996) reported poor implementation of project-based learning in three middle school classrooms and one high school classroom. The findings indicated that it was a lack of student social skills that made the project-based learning an unsuccessful venture, which suggests that the success of project-based learning can be limited if students lack certain social skills. It was also reported that the projects were 'highly scripted' which may have accounted for unsatisfactory student participation.

After studying fourth, fifth and sixth grade students in the project-based setting, Atwood (1983) suggested that a difficulty he noted in the project-based learning process was that students were easily engaged with procedurally simple tasks rather than when working on tasks that require more complexity. Students in the study had a difficult time thinking about the bigger picture of the project, preferring to focus on the smaller tasks. This prevented students from answering the higher order questions that were central to the learning process (Atwood).

A more recent study that built upon Atwood's findings, Krajcik, Blumenfeld, Marx, Bass, Fredericks & Solloway (1998) concluded that many students had difficulty

managing complexity and time, as well as developing logical arguments to support claims. It was also noted that students pursued questions without understanding their relevance or importance. Another claim set forth by the study was that students chose guiding questions based on personal preference rather than questions that were relevant to the study. Mergendoller (2009) re-states what was concluded by Viner and Sylvester (2003) above by saying that when students are asking irrelevant questions or headed in a direction they shouldn't be, it is more than likely that they have not been taught the necessary skills for success with the project. The authors suggest the use of scaffolding learning for the students to create a knowledge base (direct instruction) before the students begin their project. Once scaffolding has taken place, it is important to structure the student activities in a way that facilitates student success and meaningful learning. It is imperative for student progression to be carefully monitored as they progress through different project stages (Krajcik, 1998).

Synthesis of Literature Review

The literature review helped to inform me on areas of importance as they relate to project-based learning. Each section of the literature review contained elements that were necessary to increase my understanding of effective project-based instruction and implementation.

By gaining an in-depth understanding of project-based learning through researching the origins of the constructivist methodology, I was able to accurately develop a foundation for the vision of my Leadership Application Project. In understanding the origins of project-based learning as they relate to present day project-based learning, I developed a broader understanding of the progression of this methodology as it pertains to the current educational environment. Although its use is widespread, research on the effectiveness is still relatively unknown. Variables that attribute to the success and failure of project-based learning are relatively vague. Project-based learning continues to closely follow a constructivist ideology and continues to gain in popularity within a variety of different classroom settings around the world.

Many features of effective classroom practice regarding project-based learning are contained within my model and were used in practice. Features that were less effective as well as challenges encountered gave me insight into making my instruction, and my model, more effective. Furthermore, the practice of using project-based learning in the classroom educated me on proper teaching and facilitation strategies that should be used within the classroom environment. Insight into alternative forms of assessment

helped guide me toward alternative measures that would further engage students in both their projects and in the assessment process.

Through my research I learned that project-based learning can be a viable alternative when compared to more traditional educational methodologies, such as direct instruction. This provided encouragement in the development of the model, especially as my research progressed and challenges in implementation were encountered. The same could be said when considering the variables that have the ability to limit student achievement. There is ample research that states that students in special education benefit from high structure, step-by-step tasks and repetition. Additional research confirms that project-based instruction is not only a viable alternative to traditional learning, but has the ability to be a more effective alternative when working with students with special needs, particularly when the project-based instruction is carefully planned to include adequate structure and support.

Researching and practicing project-based instruction has now given me the insight and experience to present this initiative on a school-wide level. Throughout the process, I became aware of many areas in the overall educational environment that need to be considered when developing project-based learning across a variety of content areas and grade levels. Project-based learning needs to be consistently applied throughout the entire school while being reinforced and maintained at an administrative level in order for effective school-wide learning to take place. The use of a consistent approach and administrative support can either make or break an effective project-based model.

Overall, the areas of research surrounding project-based learning provided me with an excellent foundational overview. The research provided in-depth assistance

when developing my model. It also provided empirical insight into the facilitation process, something often lacking when examining other educational models. Although this area of learning and research could be considered new and relatively undeveloped, my understanding and delivery of project-based learning has been greatly enhanced by the current library of research.

Chapter 3: Development – The Process of Creating a Project-Based Model

The Leadership Application Project has provided an opportunity for me to create a project-based model specifically for the LLCS setting. I began the process by researching the following components I thought to be essential in developing a successful model:

- features of project-based learning.
- planning and assessment.
- how project-based learning stood up against other models of instruction.
- different student variables that limited or enhanced success and lastly.
- challenges that facilitators of project-based learning were facing.

After the initial phase of research, which marked the beginning of my literature review, I began to develop a project-based model with the intention of delivering it during my EBD transition skills class. Once the preliminary model was developed I began to meet with experts from both the areas of transition and project-based learning. These meetings offered me support, guidance and feedback throughout the implementation process of the preliminary model.

The implementation process began during the second half of the 2009-2010 school year in a middle school special education class, Real World Transitions. Five students started at the beginning of implementation while four finished the entire project-based curriculum. All the students were classified as having emotional behavior disorders as listed under the state of Minnesota criteria for EBD. My intention was to use the five transition areas as the content. The vehicle used to deliver the content would be my

preliminary project-based model. The philosophy behind the model is that any content area can be applied using my project-based model as the vehicle. Because Real World Transitions took place exclusively in a special education setting, I decided that the topic should follow a special education initiative, transition skills. Transition programming isn't required under the state of Minnesota statutes until a student turns 14 or enters the ninth grade, but based on input given to me from my transition specialist I was encouraged to begin the process earlier, hence the decision to introduce the transition programming to middle school-aged students. The five areas of transition we covered, as stated in Minnesota Statutes, are as follows: Recreation and Leisure, Home Living Skills, Post-Secondary Education, Employment and Community Participation. Each specific area of transition required the students to complete one project pertaining to each area of transition; creating a total of five projects.

The order of transition topics that we covered was strategically designed based on discussions with my advisors, as well as my own analysis. It was agreed upon that the projects would start with an area of transition that would be of high engagement to the students; therefore choosing recreation and leisure for the first project. The second project to take place was community participation. This was chosen as an opportunity to shift the focus of learning to outside of the school and set a precedent for the rest of the projects that would often involve work, or people, from outside of the school. My thought process was based around the idea that as we progressed through the projects, the real world applicability would increase; or, as we progressed the projects would deal with more mature subject matter. Keeping this principle in mind the last three projects would be, in order, post-secondary education, employment and lastly, home living skills.

By the beginning of the Real World Transitions the students clearly understood that we would be redesigning our learning environment. The anticipatory process began in the second quarter as the research and preliminary model was being developed. It was important for these students to understand what they were embarking on well before the actual implementation began to take place.

Each project in Real World Transitions revolved around a set schedule of activities that students were expected to accomplish as the project moved along. The first and most important aspect of the project-based process is the initial step of creating a guiding question that the students answer by means of their projects. This question is pivotal and requires the students to stay focused on the question throughout the project process. Other organizational components were created to manage the project process, such as creating a project calendar, compiling a resource list, setting up rubrics for assessment, coming up with a presentation plan, managing daily time effectively and gaining parent/teacher consent. Students were expected to do all of the planning before the project development took place. To ensure that the project would be completed a Project Declaration Form was completed by each student and signed by the parent, teacher, student and director. This form detailed the project from beginning to finish and helped students develop an organizational structure in working towards a goal. Once consent was obtained, students were instructed to follow a set calendar of activities in completing the project. Following completion of the project, students had to present the final product to the audience who would be responsible for the final product of assessment. After the entire process was completed for an area of transition, the process was repeated for the next area of transition

Real World Transitions lasted until the end of the school year. Students met at the end of each day, 3:30 p.m. – 4:25 p.m. in the resource room for a 55 minute period of project-based learning. A timeline of two to five weeks per project was anticipated before the start of the projects. By the end of the year, students in the class were able to complete a project for each of the five areas of transition. With all of the projects completed, three weeks were left at the end of the school year. During these final weeks, students were given an opportunity to revisit and improve upon a project or choose an area of transition for which they would like to complete another project.

Throughout Real World Transitions I reflected daily on the outcomes of the class. This reflection would consist of a short summary of the day's activities and then highlight a minimum of two things I thought went well and then two things I thought could be improved upon each day. This reflection and analysis would be used later to address certain areas of the preliminary project-based learning model that didn't seem effective. I found the reflection process critical in developing a deeper understanding of project-based learning. Reflecting on the overall experience, the majority of my learning came from those reflections.

Along with reflecting as a method of discovery I met regularly with my advisors in the areas of both transition and project-based learning. During these meetings I detailed my day-to-day experiences and discussed the challenges and successes I encountered during implementation. Much of the discussion would take place surrounding the challenges I was facing. From these challenges came more discovery and subsequent changes in implementation. Reflection was also used during these meetings to develop greater understanding of the challenges I was facing.

Leadership Application Component

During the summer of 2010, I finalized my research on the use of project-based learning. It was now time to begin toshare my experience and become a resource in the realm of project-based instruction.

The first opportunity to share the model came through a Special Education staff meeting. These meetings are held bi-monthly and include three special education teachers, one at each level: elementary, middle and high school. It was during two of these staff meetings that I took the time to present my leadership application process. The first meeting included a description of the process, from start to end, that I had engaged in. It also included a component of sharing the different projects that the students took part in. During the second meeting, I delivered the model to the teachers for their use. I encouraged them to pilot the model in their classrooms to see how the process went for them. One of the teachers is beginning to utilize the model in his social skills class. The other two anticipate delivering the model during the upcoming quarter. Following the implementation of the model I will distribute a survey to the teachers in an effort to gain initial feedback on the model. I will be available to support teachers during any phase of the project-based process.

During the 2011-12 school year, I anticipate sharing the project-based model to the entire teaching staff at Learning for Leadership Charter School during in-service days and continuing development throughout the school year. My intention is for the teachers to have a consistent, concrete model of project-based instruction that they can practice in their classrooms; making myself available as a resource.

It is my goal to continue to develop the model's effectiveness by means of practice, feedback and reflection. Facilitating project-based learning in the classroom will be a unique experience for each of the teachers involved, as well as their students. The model is meant to provide them with a foundation for implementing a consistent project-based program at Learning for Leadership.

Chapter 4: Implementation – Practicing the Model in an Educational Setting

January 3, 2010 – June 8, 2010

The following is a description of each of the projects, including planning and assessment. After each description of the project, there will be a personal reflection of the challenges and successes I encountered while facilitating the five separate projects.

These reflective summaries are based on the daily reflection log that was completed as Real World Transitions progressed through the semester. The component of reflection I found most valuable was analyzing the challenges I encountered. This provided a more sincere understanding of where the problems within the preliminary model were and how I could deliver more effective project-based instruction. After my daily reflection I would review what was written and highlight any points that I thought might benefit me when reworking the preliminary project-model.

Recreation & Leisure – Project 1

As stated before, the five students were eager to begin the project-based process based on anticipatory activities, such as discussions about topics we would be covering, that started well before Real World Transitions began. Almost all of the students had an idea of what they wanted to do by the first class. We started with an opening session [*see appendices C*] exploring what exactly Recreation & Leisure meant. Students easily understood the importance of recreation and leisure stating that it was a necessary part of life because it involved doing things that people enjoy, in turn, creating a sense of happiness. The students acknowledged activities that they enjoyed doing, which in turn made them happy.

Five students were a part of the first project. Three students split up into one group and decided on creating an instructional skateboard video with a secondary emphasis on skateboard safety. One student had an interest in building things and was also a fan of football. This student chose to build a model of the Super Bowl trophy. Lastly, one student had an interest in street art. From this interest he developed a gallery of graffiti art that was created on cardboard.

Assessment for the project took place in the form of rubrics. A self-assessment rubric was developed by the students, a teacher created rubric was developed and implemented for daily productivity and the ability to respect others in a social setting, and lastly a rubric was developed for the public to fill out at an event called The Exhibition of Learning. This event was took place on a Saturday at LLCS, enabling parents and community members to come in and view projects. Parents were able to view the final products that the students had created and give them a grade based on a pre-developed rubric. Averages were compiled after all components of the assessment took place and the students were given a final grade.

Personal Reflection on Project #1 – Recreation and Leisure

The students' individual interests were all highlighted in the first round of projects, yet each of the projects was different, just as the students are. Within the first project students engaged in a learning process that they were totally unfamiliar with. I was aware of this and understood that it would take time for the students to understand the process that they were about to engage in. It was often the students' enthusiasm for the project that would limit them in fulfilling some of the organizational components of

the project such as creating a project intent form and gathering resources. I quickly realized that the students had no self-direction or discipline in accomplishing tasks and needed much direction in completing the necessary components of the project. More often than not, the students would just want to jump into the project without any planning or resources. They had no idea of how to organize this project. The same disorganization would often be the students' main challenge in the general education setting as well. Observing this, I quickly relied on a strategy I typically use when teaching my academic content courses: setting daily, individual goals with each of the students. Although the students were unable to see the big picture and how the organizational process would help their projects in the end, they would still be able to take part in the process and learn the big picture as they went. This was unexpected and frustrating for me. I wanted them to understand the model right away, and then get started creating the organization for their projects. I soon realized this was me trying to force the students into understanding a process that would take a lot of time, probably more like a year, rather than a few months. This was the first, and one of the most important, lessons that I learned about project-based learning: it takes time for students to develop an understanding of why they're doing something. Just as I had learned in my own project-based learning experience, most of the learning happens after the process and project has been completed. The real learning happens when you find a moment in life where you can connect the processes that you have learned in classroom. I would have to set daily goals for the students until they had an opportunity to connect these processes to something in their lives. Ultimately, they would have to find a moment in life that they could connect

these learning processes to, whether it be the current project they're working on or something that happens further as an application in their own lives.

Another unexpected challenge that was encountered at the beginning had again to do with my misinterpretation of project-based learning. I was under the impression that the students were the ones guiding their learning, adding an element of flexibility to the process. This is true, but I quickly learned the flexibility needs to lie within a very structured process that the teacher must create.

For the recreation and leisure project I was unaware of this and let the students set up their own projects. There were three extremely different projects taking place at one time and I was the only adult able to support the three projects. Logistically, this was nearly impossible and I often had to be in three different places simultaneously. Additionally, the resource lists that were developed were based on the notion that some of the resources could be acquired through other people in the building. I initially thought that the students would take the lead in acquiring the resources, but quickly found out I would be the one obtaining the resources and making sure the resources got back to the rightful owners. Managing three different projects and a variety of resources, such as a borrowed video camera and editing program, turned out to be extremely exhausting on my part. I began to question the effectiveness of my facilitation because of the logistical difficulties I had created for myself. I realized this was an area I needed more guidance in. As the first round of projects came to a close I was overwhelmed and I felt I needed feedback from my project-based specialist as to how to make projects more manageable.

The strength behind the recreation and leisure project was the enthusiasm the students brought to the class every day. They were genuinely excited about taking part in the process and this enthusiasm for completing a project was something I rarely saw when they are in the academic setting. On top of their enthusiasm for the projects, the students were constructively engaging in problem solving activities together, learning how to collaborate and work together as a team. Lastly, the students created some very unique and interesting projects that drew a fine impression from other teachers and students.

Community Participation – Project 2

The opening lesson for community participation involved the students analyzing and then discussing the communities in which they live. Most students were quick to realize the negative impacts of their communities, many of which revolved around gangs and violence. After a lengthy discussion about their social surroundings the question was asked, "How can you make your community a better place?" The guiding question was a component that I used in helping students create a reference point for the project. During the initial project, I let the students come up with the question that they were trying to answer. I learned by giving them ultimate flexibility in creating the question that the projects then became unmanageable, logistically, for me to facilitate. It was through this experience and reasoning that I decided to assist them more in developing the guiding question for this project. The question was used as a focal point throughout the entire project and I often used it as a redirection tool if the students got off track considering what it was they were trying to accomplish. The intention was that students would

gradually develop their own guiding questions when they became more familiar with the process. In this instance, the guiding question led us into a discussion about the positive components that helped make their communities better. Many of the students spent a lot of time at their local Parks & Recreation Centers and soon realized this was a positive aspect of their neighborhoods. They began to inquire about ways to help the Parks and Recreation Center in the neighborhood closest to the school. From this point, students invited the director from the local Parks and Recreation Center to the school to find out more about volunteering opportunities. The director was more than willing to assist the students in activities to assist the Recreation Center. After the scheduling and paperwork was completed by the students, they went to the Recreation Center and volunteered for a day.

Assessment for the project again took place in the form of rubrics. Students assessed themselves based on a rubric developed before the project. Once the project was completed they filled out the rubric and graded themselves. Another rubric, developed by the students, was given to the director of the Parks & Recreation organization that hosted our volunteering efforts. This rubric was administered to gain her assessment of the work that the students had completed. Finally, a teacher-created rubric was used to assess students on daily productivity and attitude [See Appendix L]. Averages were compiled and students were assigned a grade. The project was presented in the form of a picture board, again at the LLCS Exhibition of Learning. It was at this event that students were able to gain community and parental feedback on their community participation project.

Reflection on Project 2 – Community Participation

Between the end of the recreation and leisure project and the beginning of the community participation project I met with my project-based specialist to discuss some of the challenges I was having. It was at this meeting that I began to learn that by giving the students the ultimate flexibility it limited me and my responsibility as a facilitator. With this in mind, I learned that the students needed increased structure when first brainstorming ideas and developing a guiding question. Once the structured is created and the students are working within the same process, they will find freedom and flexibility in their learning experiences. Another component that I learned as a facilitator was to bring community resources in to help decrease the workload on my end. In some sense the idea that was brought forth by the project-based specialist was to incorporate community resources to help facilitate the process. As I moved forward into the community participation project, I made sure to keep in mind these two key lessons that I learned.

In the introductory lesson for community participation, I had the students analyze their own neighborhood's strengths and weaknesses. I was happy with the outcome of the discussion, which lasted two full class periods. The discussion led us all to a point where we asked ourselves the question "How can we improve our community?" The students all had a strong connection to their individual recreation centers. Also evident was that the centers were a place to develop positive connections within their communities. This helped me in guiding the students down a more structured path of answering the question. The question developed further when we asked, "How can we help the local recreation center?" With the more detailed question it was easier for me to

contact the director there and have her come in and explain to us how we can improve the state of the recreation center; thus bringing in an outside resource to help me facilitate the group.

The director came in and spoke with the group about volunteer ideas and essentially took over the facilitation process once we all arrived at the center to volunteer. This again helped decrease my workload in comparison to the first project. We learned that the director not only guided us in fulfilling the community participation component of the process, but that she was also knowledgeable in the area of youth employment, which would prove beneficial to us in our upcoming project surrounding employment.

One problem encountered in the community participation project was the lapse in time we had from one step to the next. I found myself scrambling for lesson ideas at the last minute while the students waited for the day in which they would volunteer. A lesson I learned throughout the process was to always have additional back-up lessons prepared to keep students busy when there is an unforeseeable lag in the project's development.

Another unforeseen problem was the students' lack of motivation once we actually started volunteering. The students literally needed step-by-step instructions on what to do and how to do it. If they weren't prompted they would quickly engage in negative activity and discussion that would limit the ultimate success of the project. I found myself having a difficult time trying to engage the students in labor-intensive activities which they had all agreed to take part in. To address this challenge, I began to 'dangle the carrot' and offer incentives if the students completed certain tasks. One

incentive was a trip to McDonald's. This helped immensely and by the end of the afternoon the students were independently working hard to complete the tasks set forth.

Post-Secondary Education – Project 3

The post-secondary education introductory lesson involved students envisioning where they could picture themselves in ten years, a point at which they would either be employed or in a post-secondary institution. All five students showed interest in attending some sort of post-secondary program. Three said they wanted to go to the University of Minnesota, one said he wanted to go to a trade school to become a mechanic, and the last student said he wanted to study at McNally Smith School of Music in St. Paul. The students were unable to elaborate any further on what it takes to get into college or the application process. From this point, I had students envision themselves standing in the admissions office and had them all come up with a list of five questions they might have about their future educational opportunities.

At this time, I presented the students with a guiding question: "What are three things I must do in order to gain admittance to a post-secondary program of my choice?" This would turn into our guiding question for the post-secondary project. I directed the students in saying they needed to set up two appointments that fall on the same day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The appointments needed to be scheduled at two institutions of higher learning and that they must work together to figure out what the two institutions would be and how to schedule their visits. We put together a calendar and made a resource list of all of the colleges in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. Once a date had been set, the students decided upon choosing the University of Minnesota and

the Minneapolis Community and Technical College. The students were prompted to independently contact the admissions offices of both institutions to schedule the appointment for the selected day. As a class, we decided that the final product would take the shape of a picture journal entry. The students would answer the guiding question using their writing skills. I informed them that I would take pictures of the process and that they could include pictures in their journal entries.

After the appointments had been scheduled, we spent three days fine-tuning the questions that they would present. The students were excited about visiting the colleges, although I'm not sure it was for the right reasons. Meanwhile, after the students made contact with the college representatives, I contacted the same people and informed them a little more thoroughly as to what the visit would entail. I also included information about our project and let them know that the students were only in 7th grade. Some might consider the students too young for this experience, but I really felt it was important for them to go to a post-secondary institution and ask questions, essentially beginning to prepare them for the real thing farther down the road.

The appointments lasted about an hour and each of the students was able to ask all their questions. One student was absent the day we went, which made things difficult regarding the journal entry. The students were well behaved and respectful to the tour guides.

Again we utilized three forms of assessment for the project. A rubric was developed by me and agreed upon by the group as a whole for their daily participation and respectfulness. The students developed a rubric to grade themselves on once the final product was finished. Finally, the students gave a simple rubric to the tour guide at

each of the colleges to fill out regarding their respectfulness and participation during the tours.

Personal Reflection on Project 3 – Post Secondary Education

As I became more comfortable with the project-based process, it was becoming easier for me to implement, and to enjoy the process. With project three, I added even more structure and was able to give students the direction to set up community resources that could aid us in answering the guiding question. During project two I still felt that the students were having difficulty developing a guiding question. With this project I decided to administer a guiding question to the students, which they responded to quite well. I was also excited about the final products, because it incorporated some writing activities in it, a task in which all of the students needed a little extra practice.

Again there was some lag time on our calendar, so I made sure to compile back-up lessons for days when we didn't have much to do. Most of these lessons were easy to put together and were compiled through the use of Internet resources. I also incorporated art projects, which the students really seemed to enjoy. It was beneficial for me to keep the students busy from day-to-day, something I did struggle with during our second project.

During the third project, students really began to incorporate other areas of transition into their post-secondary education projects, particularly home living skills and employment. I began to develop an idea of somehow connecting different transition areas into a project, but I became uncomfortable with the thought of improvising and decided it would be best to stick to my original plan. I found this interesting and thought

that perhaps when other teachers became comfortable with the framework they might try to connect subjects within a project, or try two projects at once. It was a positive feeling to see the students draw various connections to other parts of the transition spectrum.

I was challenged by taking such a young group of students to tour colleges. I'm not sure the students felt they were ready to do this yet and most of the college conversations they had revolved around 'college girls.' This made it frustrating for me when I saw the students often not taking this project seriously. In the end, I was able to expose them to a world they all strived for and this made me feel better about our experience.

Another challenge that was consistent with the first two projects was having the students independently complete the required project-based protocols. Although we had taken part in the process twice, the students still needed prompting with almost every step to organize their projects. The process became much simpler to me and the pressure that I put on myself from the beginning was easing up.

I was impressed with our methods of assessment and enjoyed the students taking part in the process, even though they needed much prompting. The students seemed to be very creative in coming up with different forms of assessment for each of the three projects that we had completed thus far. This could be said for the final products as well.

Employment – Project 4

The introductory lesson for this project created a real sense of excitement for the students that I did not expect. I developed three real world scenarios regarding employment options. One job was a lawn-mower, the second was a grocery store bagger

and the last job was a painter. I chose these jobs based on my first employment experiences as a youth. All I really had to do was determine an hourly wage for each of these jobs. Once an hourly wage was established for each position, I had the students figure out how much money they would make. I applied different scenarios, for example working part-time or full time. They began coming up with their own scenarios through this process and began assessing the data to compile a list of dollar amounts connected to working full-time through the summer, part-time through the school year, and eventually full-time year round. Again, I was excited to see the students use their math skills in conjunction with real world scenarios. What really set the students off was to see how much money they could actually make. Excitement and smiles could be seen on the faces of each student.

Once the introductory lesson took place, the students were all enthusiastic to find jobs. Once again their excitement limited their attention in the planning phases for this project. Again, I presented a guiding question, which read, "How do I find a job?" The simplicity of the questions encouraged creativity on the behalf of the students. This allowed for students to be individually creative in finding an answer to the question. The students then began to brainstorm final product ideas and decided upon the final product of finding employment. It took considerable effort to move them away from this goal as I was sure their ages limited them from finding employment at that time. I had students research Minnesota statutes on youth employment which turned out to be very valuable for them. It was encouraging to see the students so excited learning about state statutes that applied to them. Eventually, I guided them into developing a job resource handbook

that they would be able to use once they became a little older. I encouraged the students to contact their list of potential employers once the list was established.

This project moved away from actually going out into the community, but it still utilized connections with the community. After students developed a calendar, resource list, project intent form and their idea for the final product, we realized that this project would be relatively short in nature, only spanning two weeks. The students were still driven on the intent to find a job and this sense of excitement created a strong work ethic.

Students were able to draw on a connection from the past using the director of the local recreation center and her skills in connecting youth with jobs. By means of a conference call they found two organizations that connect youth with some promising summer jobs; one being a golf caddyship with opportunities for future scholarships and the other being a part of non-profit cookie making business that targets youth from the inner-city.

At the end of the two week period the students had worked together to create a job resource manual. They had listed and contacted upwards of 35 different organizations in the Minneapolis area. To no avail, not one of the organizations hired 13 year olds. Once the students realized this I felt the project lost a lot of steam. I continued to encourage them by telling them that they will have a great start finding a job when they are able to become employable.

Assessment for the project again consisted of three components. I rated students on daily participation and respectfulness by means of a rubric, the students rated their own final products on a rubric developed by them. Lastly, their parents rated their resource book based on a rubric developed by the students and myself.

Personal Reflection on Project 4 - Employment

I had never expected such enthusiasm from the students regarding the employment project. They found it hard to concentrate on other subjects when they were in the midst of this project because all they could think about was the money that employment could bring them. Again this excitement limited the organizational structure of the project, but it created a worthwhile final product that the students can use in the future.

Before I began facilitating the project-based units I envisioned teaching the students valuable organizational skills that they could hopefully apply towards other subjects in school. At this point, I was beginning to give up on that idea. I continually needed to coach students through each phase of implementation. My preconceived notion was that by this point the students would be able to work independently through the project; the fact that they required so much guidance left me frustrated. I was, however, enthused about the opportunities the students were creating for themselves. The nature of their disabilities often makes school boring and with these projects they were excited about learning and coming to class.

This project reinforced for me the idea that when students are excited and motivated about learning they can accomplish anything they put their minds to. I initially set a quota of finding 15 organizations that could be potential employers. When I set them free they came up with 15 in the first 10 minutes. They were extremely proactive when contacting the organizations as well and needed almost no direction or prompting. I never would have anticipated the excitement caused by 'employment,' but it brought me

a lot of hope for their futures. It also reminded me that an effective tool in working with students who don't necessarily show a lot of interest in their academics is to connect academics to real life situations which helps students identify a personal benefit in the content of the curriculum. My confidence in project-based learning grew a lot during this project. I began to see improvement regarding their socialization skills. Immaturity hampered our efforts from time to time, but this can be expected when working with an adolescent population.

Home Living Skills – Project 5

The home living skills introductory lesson began as a direct extension from the employment section. Instead of focusing on youth employment I had students suggest a profession that they found interesting once they had completed some form of post-secondary training. For some reason it was difficult for the students to think appropriately when considering a future profession. For instance, one student wanted to be a professional skateboarder while another wanted to be a stage dancer for hip hop groups. I found it a challenge to not discourage their dreams, but needed the students to consider a profession that was in some sense more realistic. Eventually, the group had all chosen professions which were realistically achievable. Once the students chose a profession we set up a guiding question based on their chosen profession. We needed to connect the profession to a home living situation that would be different for each student. I developed some examples of questions based on the direction I wanted the students to take and then the students were able to choose a question that they were able to work with. For example, "What kind of home living environment would be realistic if I were a

_____?" The students then would fill in the blank with the profession that they chose. My purpose for starting this way was two-fold. I wanted the students to continue their enthusiasm for working and making money, but behind it all I wanted them to evaluate what kind of lifestyle they would be able to achieve if they indeed did decide to choose their respective paths.

As a group, the students had a very difficult time figuring out what kind of final product they would produce for this particular project. It was discouraging for me because although I tried to maintain a high level of enthusiasm, the students' interest in the project seemed to fade quickly. That, coupled with the fact that the school year was coming to a close, was making things difficult for me in my daily work with the students. Eventually, we came to a consensus that we would develop a Home Living Report that would highlight a house that they could afford and other monthly expenditures that they would be faced with.

After we completed a schedule, a resource list and a project intent form, it appeared that this would be a relatively short project as well, estimated at two weeks. As previously mentioned, the students were not showing a high level of interest so I asked them if they had a choice what would they like to work on. All of them stated that they would like to do another recreation and leisure project. From this feedback I told the students that if they completed the Home Living Report that they could indeed use the last two and a half weeks of school to either go back and improve upon their recreation and leisure projects or begin a short one that they would be able to complete within the allotted time frame.

As we began the actual project work I first wanted students to gain a better understanding of what types of expenses were accrued in day-to-day living. They didn't quite understand what it took, but I didn't want to simply tell them based on my living situation, so I thought this would be a good time to involve parents in the project process. My first piece of instruction, and the group's first goal of the project, was to go home and inquire of their parent/guardian about the types of expenses they had on a month-to-month basis. Once the students were able to gather a list and any numbers that coincided with it, we would all sit down evaluate the lists. It was my intention for the lists to be relatively the same with some minor differences. Students responded well to the family involvement and all of them came back within three school days with their findings. Once the students returned with their research I met individually with them to finalize a monthly expense list that they would use in their report.

Following the research the students performed, I then had them develop a monthly budget for their entertainment expenses. Once the students came up with an idea of about how much money they wanted to spend on necessary and entertainment expenses, we started to analyze how the expense total compared with their salaries from the professions that they chose. After I was able to individually meet with each of the students to analyze their expenses, they came up with a dollar amount that was left over. This amount would be how much each student could spend on housing.

The next step in our project process would be to find an appropriate living environment for each of the students. This started with finding an area to live. Three out the five students chose the Minneapolis area and two of the students decided that they would like to live in California. I had students research two different housing options,

one being an apartment and the other a house so they had something to compare. Students then used the Internet to find housing, with websites I suggested. The websites all had a mortgage estimator on them and I showed the students how to use this. From the calculator, they were able to see how much money they would have to spend per month on housing. They were then able to get an idea of how much money they would be able to spend for an apartment or house.

After the students completed their research, I had them fill in the information and pictures of the houses they had selected into a template that I had created for the project. Once the students completed the templates, I had them compile their information into a presentation folder that they could take home.

Again, the assessment for this project took part in three different formats. I assessed the students based on daily participation and respectfulness, the students then assessed their final projects based on a rubric developed after they had conceptualized what the final product would look like, and finally their parents filled out the same rubric based on their opinions of the finished product. Averages among all three assessments were calculated and a grade was given to each of the students.

Personal Reflection on Project 5 – Home Living Skills

This project started off strong, but the students seemed to quickly lose enthusiasm. It turned out to be the most difficult project of all in regards to student participation and behavior. I began to question whether or not the students were developmentally ready to take on a project like this. There was a lot of math and number calculation involved which seemed to quickly discourage the students.

In addition to some of the in-class motivational difficulties we were focusing on, some of the students in my class started to show more severe behaviors in other classes that warranted suspension. This behavior happened more frequently toward the end of the year and, unfortunately, one student ended up being removed from the school. Often, because I was the case manager, I was involved in these situations and the problems would often spill over into my class. To say the least, some of my students had a tough time the last six weeks of school and the project seemed to lack priority compared to some of the issues that we were facing.

The length of the project exceeded the two week scheduled time period by about 8 school days. This could be attributed to the behavior issues and lack of student motivation. Overall, only three students actually completed the Home Living Report. One student left the school and another student ended the school year early to travel. After completing Project 5, the group had about 6 school days left. They chose to shoot more skateboarding and increase the length and quality of the initial video from project 1, as I told them they would be able to do. It seemed an appropriate way to end our project cycle and the students showed motivation in making the first project better. We were able to get some more video shot, but actual editing and production were postponed due to the school year ending.

Chapter 5: Analysis – Reflection and Continued Model Development

As I began the use of project based learning with my students I felt confident and extremely well prepared. I developed the model that I would come to implement, so I knew I understood what it was I had to do. The research had been done and I felt a high sense of awareness about what was expected as I engaged the students in the project-based process. I quickly realized, however, that while my preparation helped, it didn't ultimately satisfy my expectations for this project. The most conclusive statement as to the effectiveness of not just my project-based model, but of the entire project-based process, is that successful project-based learning requires practice on the part of both the student and the teacher.

As I began the first project I quickly felt overwhelmed. The students' enthusiasm and the freedom I gave them left me exhausted at the end of each day. I found it extremely difficult to manage the different student projects at the same time and found myself locating resources for them most of the time. Meanwhile the students were doing great. Their enthusiasm was evident and the projects turned out great. I needed to find strategies of my own that would make the projects more manageable for myself, yet still created the enthusiasm for the students. With the help of my project-based expert and revisions to my original model, I began to add more structure to the projects while setting and documenting daily goals for the students. Bringing in outside resources to help facilitate the process proved extremely useful and informative. It also engaged the students more. Creativity and art proved to be extremely helpful when extra time became available as we waited for the scheduled days in which we were to carry out the projects.

As I moved forward with the projects I included all of these strategies into the process. These are strategies I did not anticipate. I had to experience the project-based process in order to fully understand it. As I added more structure, it seemed the students' enthusiasm diminished. With this I began to understand that each project needed balance between creating a flexible learning environment and a certain structure or set of rules that has been established beforehand. These ideas correlate strongly with my literature review in stating that students will need a balanced approach that incorporates components of both direct instruction and project-based learning into the curriculum. I gradually began to master this concept by the end of the term. Reflection turned out to be very useful in understanding my frustrations and then countering those frustrations with strategies. In the future, as I practice project-based learning more, I'm confident that my approach will solidify, yet I will always need to remain flexible, keeping in mind the students that I am serving, as well as the content that I am delivering.

After researching project-based instruction, talking with project-based experts and reviewing a variety of project-based curriculum, it became clearer to me that project based instruction was indeed something that needs to be practiced and tailored towards one's teaching style and the students being served. Within my research, I never came across a specific type of model that guides teachers through each step of delivering project-based instruction. Researchers analyzed different phases of the instructional approach, but there wasn't a concrete/simplistic model that one could view, such as the one I developed. The strategies were much the same as in my model such as the use of guiding questions and the use of calendars, but the format of how to implement the process was often vague and difficult to follow. I feel that my model relays a simplistic

step-by-step approach that teachers will be able to incorporate into their instruction. Although each teacher will surely facilitate the process uniquely, according to individual student needs and their own pedagogy, the model has the ability to be a foundational resource. I also feel that this model and my experience can offer valuable insight to a process which has been tried in an environment where students can be extremely challenging. I feel that my model and the knowledge gained is applicable to any classroom, yet in order to get the most out of the project-based learning experience, teachers and students need to embark on the experience of project-based learning and learn from each other's mistakes.

Critical Assessment of Final Product and Student Impact

My experience with project-based instruction is limited to working with a small group of students. The model's intention is to provide a foundation for any classroom, general or special education. This model may not generalize as well as intended to in larger groups or classrooms. This is an area of recommendation for further research. Additional research and insight from general education teachers who practice the model would add legitimacy and breadth to my model. I intend to gain feedback from teachers who use the model when working with larger groups of students in hopes of understanding how the model will work in larger settings.

The small group of students I worked with were able to learn a great deal about planning, organizing, and working together towards a common goal, all while maintaining a general sense of enthusiasm for the work they were taking part in. They were able to participate in a number of opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have had if

they had been in a more traditional classroom. I also feel they gained an immeasurable amount of social knowledge working together as a team and connecting themselves to different resources in the community. I feel that focusing on transition as our area of learning gave students a head start in preparing them for their futures. Project-based learning allowed a unique way for students to gain a deeper insight into their own interests and aspirations. Although organizational skills weren't mastered through the process, organization did make up a large component of the work the students were taking part in. Project-based learning did help them become more organized thinkers, an area of need they all had.

After this experience, I will continue to use project-based learning in the classroom and continually refine my strategies to become a more proficient facilitator of this learning style.

Modifications made to the Original Model

The reflection process helped me gain an in depth understanding of project-based learning and the parts that needed to be revised in order to make the model more successful. The first improvements made to the original model included efforts to better organize the process and make the model more applicable to anyone who uses it. I divided the process into six different phases, which I presented using a graphic organizer (Appendices B). Each phase is composed of questions the teacher should ask as they progress through that phase or questions they should ask the students. Within the Planning Phase, I highlighted components that must be completed by students while being facilitated by the teacher. My intentions were to keep the model simple and

provide a general understanding of the project-based approach. I chose to take this approach because each teacher will essentially deliver the project-based model in a unique way, based on his or her personality and teaching style.

For the Introductory Lesson – Phase I, I stressed the importance of captivating the audience while delivering instruction that engaged students based on creativity and real-world applicability. These ideas were not fully included in the initial model, but proved to be essential in my own practice. Another key component added in Phase I was the idea of creating a structured process versus creating a flexible process. Each teacher should make decisions about structure versus flexibility based on their knowledge of the students they are teaching, as well as the students' experience with the project-based approach. The more the students understand the project approach, more flexibility should be given.

Phase II centered on developing a guiding question that pertains to the topic, the standards, and student's interest. The guiding question should drive the entire project process and be used as a guide in completing the learning process. I changed the initial idea of having the students create the question to having the teacher lead this process, sometimes creating the guiding question for them. This thinking was based on the needs of the students taking part in the process and their experience in working with the model. Once again, the more experience students have in working with the project-based process and model, the more independence they should have when creating their guiding question.

Phase III addresses Project Planning. This phase addresses five key components towards the project's success: brainstorming, final product, resource inventory, project

timeline and assessment procedures. This model requires each component. The changes made to this section of the model again revolved around organization and stressing the importance of addressing each highlighted area in the project planning phase. This section contains the most important organizational components for completing the project. It will also give students recognizable steps that they will be able to apply in future project endeavors.

Phase IV is the Project Declaration component of the model. This phase changed relatively little from the initial model design. Students were required to submit a letter of intention summarizing what the project would address and what the final product would look like. The declaration requires students to gain consent from all relevant parties, most of whom should be part of the assessment process. A template should be used for the declaration phase, and other phases as well, so students become familiar with the process

Phase V of the project based process is Project Development. This is when the teacher, by facilitating the process, will acquire their own unique understanding of the project process. The changes made from the initial model were minimal. The revised model requires the teacher to conference with the students regularly. Flexibility is key for the teacher to understand what works best for them. As the teacher becomes more comfortable with the project process, they will develop a flow for facilitating project development. The learning happens within the practice, just as it should for the students in the project-based learning experience.

Phase VI is the Project Presentation phase. This is how and where the students will present their final products and how the final assessment will take place. Much of the

actual planning for the final product will already be accomplished in the Project Planning Phase, but this is where the delivery of the final product will take place. Students should determine what kind of presentation should be delivered and when it should be delivered. They also need to determine the audience for the presentation and who will take part in the assessment process. Changes from the original model were minimal, but it does include a simplification of the presentation process.

The revised model was intended to do two things: make the model simpler for the teacher to follow and to create flexibility for the teacher when implementing this project based approach. I felt that the initial project based model was too structured. I learned through the process of facilitating this model that there needs to be room for trial and error as well as flexibility. Teachers need to learn as they go and develop systems and routines that work best for them. The revised model is essentially a basic guideline for them to use and fall back on when necessary. Most of what will actually happen in the classroom will be unique to each teacher's personality and pedagogical style.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I've created a model for delivering project-based instruction. The model has the potential to guide relative newcomers to project-based learning through the process of using this alternative instructional method. This final paper combines the research, reflection and professional feedback that have supported the development of the model.

The research I have highlighted shows that effective project-based learning considers all student characteristics and combines different teaching methodologies. Structure and flexibility are of equal importance. Project-based experiences need to combine direct instruction, scaffolding and inquiry to achieve a high level of student success. These methodologies should be considered based on the needs of individual students and the group as a whole. With time, practice, and coaching, teachers can become proficient facilitators of my model.

As my literature review and development/implementation progressed, I began building a foundation of knowledge, confidence and experience surrounding project-based learning. Now that the foundation has been established, I intend to further my understanding of project-based learning by continuing to facilitate and work with the process in classrooms. I believe that I have become a resource in the area of project-based learning and will share my knowledge, and model, with other teachers. A core understanding I have gained from this experience is that implementing a project-based model while continually refining one's skills as a facilitator of this process provides students with a unique and rich learning experience.

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Introductory Lesson – Phase I

How much direction do you want to give students?
Do the students need structure to succeed? How much?
Do the students need flexibility to succeed? How much?
Does your lesson engage the student by captivating their interests?
Does it involve individual students to express their creativity?
Does your lesson have a real-world component to it?
Have the standards been addressed? Or are the students aware of what they are expected to learn?

Develop a Guiding Question – Phase II

Student or teacher created?
Should the question be general *or* specific?
Will it limit students from meeting *all* standards?
Is it real world?
Does it connect to students' life?

Project Planning – Phase III

Brainstorm – Facilitate student discussion around what they would like to create.
Keep in mind the level of structure or flexibility you are giving student.

What will the final product look like?
Will the final product address the question? Standards?

Resource Inventory - What resources do you have right now?
What is realistic?
Can parents or community be involved?

Project Timeline – Student created calendar of activities for project completion.

Assessment – How will student work be assessed? Rubrics? Who will be the assessor(s)?

Project Declaration – Phase IV

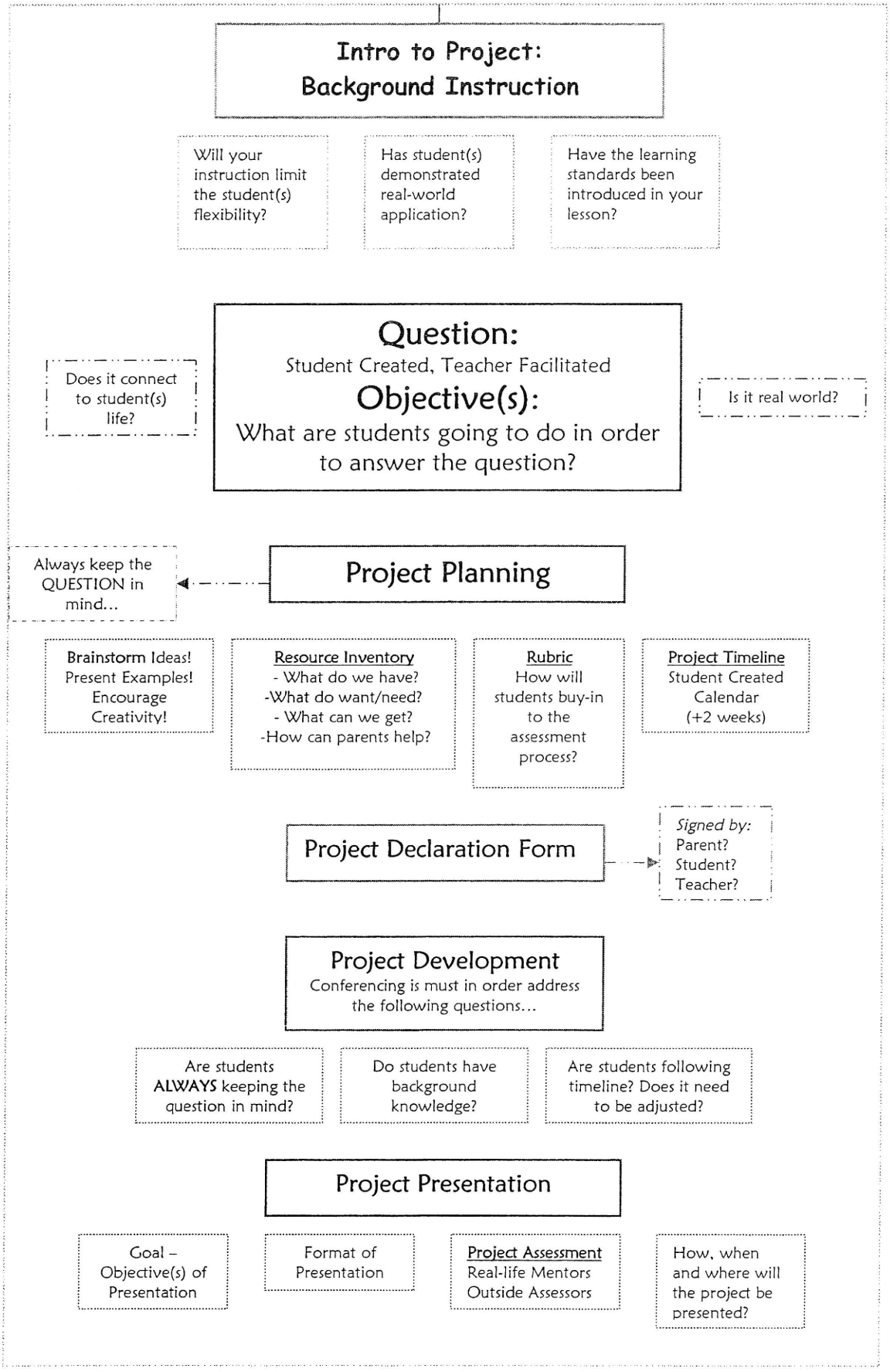
Does the project have signed consent by all parties relevant to the success of it?
Parents? Student(s)? Teacher? Administration? Community participants?

Project Development – Phase V

Are you conferencing with student regularly to ensure proper progression?
Are students following project timeline? Does it need to be adjusted?
Is the question always being considered?

Project Presentation – Phase VI

How/where will students present the project?
Who do the students want to assess it?
How will the final product be assessed?


Intro to Project:
Background Instruction
Will your instruction limit the student(s) flexibility?
Has student(s) demonstrated real-world application?
Have the learning standards been introduced in your lesson?
Question:
Student Created, Teacher Facilitated
Objective(s):
What are students going to do in order to answer the question?
Does it connect to student(s) life?
Is it real world?
Always keep the QUESTION in mind...
Project Planning
Brainstorm Ideas!
Present Examples!
Encourage Creativity!
Resource Inventory
- What do we have?
-What do want/need?
- What can we get?
-How can parents help?
Rubric
How will students buy-in to the assessment process?
Project Timeline
Student Created Calendar
(+2 weeks)
Project Declaration Form
Signed by:
Parent?
Student?
Teacher?
Project Development
Conferencing is must in order address the following questions...
Are students ALWAYS keeping the question in mind?
Do students have background knowledge?
Are students following timeline? Does it need to be adjusted?
Project Presentation
Goal – Objective(s) of Presentation
Format of Presentation
Project Assessment
Real-life Mentors
Outside Assessors
How, when and where will the project be presented?

Leadership Application Project
Project 1: Leisure Activities
Introductory Lesson Plan

I. Topic/Title: Leisure Skills

II. Purpose/Objectives/Outcomes:
The student will be able to name a minimum of 4 leisure skills that they currently possess and apply them to their futures 10 years down the road.

The student will be able to name a minimum of 3 leisure skills that they may be interested in pursuing.

III. Assessment of student outcomes:
Students must convey 7 different leisure skills. These skills must be specific to the area of leisure and 4 of them must be applicable 10 years from now.

IV. Materials/Resources/Technology
Internet
Computers
Notebook
Pencils
Worksheet
Smartboard

V. Instructional Strategies
1.) Intro: Teacher will ask what the students' definition of leisure is.
2.) Teacher will identify the exact definition of 'Recreation' and 'Leisure' to the students.
3.) Teacher will discuss with students exactly why Recreation and Leisure skills are important to have.
4.) Teacher will model different leisure skills (4) that they currently possess and then apply them to future living (5 years).
5.) Teacher will model different leisure skills (3) that they are interested in pursing in the future.
6.) Students will be asked to write down 4 leisure skills that they already possess and write how they will apply to their future. Students will then write down 3 leisure skills they would like to pursue and then write why they are interested in pursing.
7.) Students will share their leisure skills.

Leadership Application Project
Project 2: Community Participation
Introductory Lesson Plan
I. Topic/Title: Community Participation

II. Purpose/Objectives/Outcomes:
The student will be able to state an appropriate example of what community participation is and then state how the example will benefit the community in a positive way.
The student will state three things they can do in their own communities that would have a positive impact.

III. Assessment of student outcomes:
Students will be assessed in three categories: participation, respectfulness and content. A rubric will be used to assess each area and an overall grade will be distributed. See attached rubric for more detailed information.

IV. Materials/Resources/Technology
Internet
Computers
Notebook
Pencils
Worksheet
Smartboard

V. Instructional Strategies
1.) Teacher will ask students what community participation is and what they think the meaning of it is. Students will write their answers on a template provided by the teacher.
2.) Teacher will ask students to share one thing about their individual communities which they think can be improved. Students will state why they think this perspective can be improved upon.
3.) Teacher will prompt students to work in a group to develop three ideas for community participation in the vicinity of the school. Students will again write down their ideas on the template provided.
4.) Teacher will present on his one year experience in Americorps and the community involvement that he participated in during that year.
5.) Teacher will prompt students to begin thinking about the question: "How can you make your community a better place?"

Leadership Application Project
Project 3: Post-Secondary Education
Introductory Lesson Plan
I. Topic/Title: Post-Secondary Education

II. Purpose/Objectives/Outcomes:
Students will create an idea of where they see themselves in ten years; around the age of 22 or 23.

III. Assessment of student outcomes:
Student will be graded, based on a rubric, by teacher on respectfulness, participation and effort. Students will also comment anonymously on each other's artwork.

IV. Materials/Resources/Technology

Internet	Paint
Computers	Wood canvases
Notebook	Paint Brushes
Pencils	Water

V. Instructional Strategies
1.) This lesson is introduced by stating to the students that we will be partaking in an art project where the students will have to come up with a graphic depiction of where the envision themselves in 10 years.

2.) Paint and wood canvases are to be distributed to the students.

3.) The students will be prompted to paint while discussing amongst each other and the teacher what they would be doing when they were 22 or 23.

4.) After the students are done with the paintings they will be asked to share their 10 year depictions with the rest of the class.

5.) Teacher will ask students to write down on the back of the painting three things they must accomplish if they would like to achieve their 10 year goals.

6.) Students will be asked to hang their artwork in the classroom.

Leadership Application Project
Project 4: Employment
Introductory Lesson Plan

I. Topic/Title: Employment

II. Purpose/Objectives/Outcomes:
Students will explore different jobs and the monetary value associated with the particular jobs.

III. Assessment of student outcomes:
Students will be assessed on respectfulness, participation and effort; based on a rubric. They will also be assessed based on finding the monetary rewards for 3 different jobs; weekly, monthly and annual income of each particular job.

IV. Materials/Resources/Technology

Internet	Computers	Calculators	Smartboard
Notebook	Pencils	Template/Worksheet	

V. Instructional Strategies
1.) Teacher will state the hourly wages of a painter, grocery store clerk and a lawnmower on the Smartboard.

2.) Students will be asked to work independently to calculate how much each position would make in a week, a month and a year.

3.) Students will be asked to share their findings with the group.

4.) Students will be prompted to come up with three other jobs they have an interest in and figure out how much money each position will make on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis.

5.) Students will be required to document and share their findings with the rest of the group.

Leadership Application Project
Project 5: Home-Living Skills
Introductory Lesson Plan

I. Topic/Title: Home-Living Skills

II. Purpose/Objectives/Outcomes:
Students will journal about a desired home-living situation they expect to achieve based on a profession they have chosen.

III. Assessment of student outcomes:
Students will be assessed on respectfulness, participation and effort; based on a rubric. They will also be assessed on their journal entries and the accuracy of the entry based on the profession that they have chosen.

IV. Materials/Resources/Technology

Internet	Computers	Calculators	Smartboard
Notebook	Pencils	Template/Worksheet	Web Resources

V. Instructional Strategies
1.) Teacher will prompt students to choose one profession that they want to pursue based on the previous employment project.

2.) Teacher will model their home-living situation based on the average annual teacher salary. Teacher will use Smartboard to demonstrate what is achievable based on an average teacher salary. Students will be asked to participate in the process offering realistic living scenarios based on a specific yearly dollar amount.

3.) Students will be prompted to write a one page essay detailing what their home situations could look like based on a chosen profession and average salary of that profession.

4.) Students will be asked share what they envision their home-life looking like. If they don't want to share their essays, they will be asked to share a dream situation of what they would live like if they had all the resources they could ever desire.

Example of Daily Reflection from Real World Transitions:

"On a 1 to 10, today was a 7. All of the kids seem to have direction for the project now. Two of the students are going to work independently while three of the others are going to work in a group, producing a video. I'm excited for the students that have chosen to pursue a project independently and after much brainstorming we have come up with a project that they feel good about. We will continue to develop the ideas they have culminated and begin to produce our driving question. I've realized that the students need to have an idea about what it is they will be doing, before they develop the question and objectives. This goes against my initial order of operations in my model and will need to be reworked.

Today's Strengths:

1.) Students are focusing in more on what it is they will be doing.

2.) Some students have chosen to do independent projects that will peak their interest more.

Today's Weaknesses:

1.) Students thoughts are still scattered and organization is not a priority at this point.

2.) Students are having a hard time grasping the concept of developing a driving question."

Example from a reflection from a meeting with the project-based expert:

"Today I met with my expert to discuss my progress. I was able to explain some of the frustrations I was having such as feeling incredibly overwhelmed managing different projects at the same time. The expert was able to give me valuable support and feedback. She seemed impressed with our first round of projects and said that these challenges and frustrations are typical with the PBL process.. She suggested that I gave the students too much freedom and flexibility for the first round of PBL and that I should tighten it up for the future lessons. Andrea stated even though the process should involve flexibility and freedom, that flexibility and freedom should come within a structured plan.

I also talked with her about the students wanting to jump right into the project and not go through any of the organizational pieces such as organizing a calendar, creating a project intent form and developing a plan. Although we were able to get all of the pieces put together, the process seemed disorganized. Andrea stated that it helps to give the students the paperwork up front, not piece by piece over a period of time. She suggested that this gives students more of an opportunity to think and organize the projects in their minds. I will try this for the next round.

Andrea encouraged me to find other people to help me with the work as well; Community people that can perhaps volunteer or be a guest speaker. She said that although it involves some work up front, it will typically save a bunch of time and energy in the long run.

We also discussed the importance of steering the students in certain directions. Going into the first lesson, Recreation & Leisure, I had my mind set on giving the students the freedom to explore, but I gave them too much freedom. The students ended up with really cool projects, but I was left feeling totally overwhelmed most days. She said that although students need flexibility we can generally steer them towards what we want them do, ultimately making the process easier, which is important when trying to manage a class doing different projects. Andrea stated projects typically involve all the students looking for different ways to answer a question. The final product should be a culmination of individual projects pieced together to make one end product.

For this round, we will all work toward a common question together and come up with a vision for one end product. This will keep us all on relatively the same page and moving forward in a consistent rhythm."

Student
Project Based Learning – Graffiti Art
January 13, 2010

Contract of Agreement

It is hereby recognized that _____ will be completing a set of Graffiti paintings done in his afternoon Project Based Learning class with Mr. Joel. The goal of this project is to explore the Recreational and Leisure activities Student has interests in.

Student will need permission to leave school from 3 p.m. until 4 p.m. on January 19, 2010. We will get more supplies for the project during this time.

Student also needs permission to use aerosol spray paints. These paints will be made available to Student only at school. Student recognizes that this is an art project and any Graffiti art in the community in inappropriate places will not be tolerated.

Student will be creating a small gallery that will be open for your display in the future. By signing the document you will also be invited to come view the gallery in support of Student. The gallery will consist of three pieces, 1 big piece and two smaller pieces.

Student's Objective: Express myself through art.

Student's question: How can art make my life better?

Student: _____

Teacher: _____

Principal: _____

Mother/Father: _____

Art Teacher: _____

Project-Based Learning Model
Teacher Survey

Question	No	Sort of	Yes
Was the model easy to follow?	O	O	O
Overall, were the students engaged in the process?	O	O	O
Did you incorporate cross-curricular activities into the project?	O	O	O
Did you find the guiding questions in the model effective?	O	O	O
Did the students have access to the model?	O	O	O
Was each phase of the model clear to understand?	O	O	O
Would you use the model again?	O	O	O
Would you recommend the model to someone else interested in project-learning?	O	O	O

What was one was component of the model that you had trouble with?

What was on component of the model that you felt was strong?

Did the model align to the standards that the students were expected to learn?

What is one area of project-based learning you could use more guidance with?

Do you think this process was a viable alternative to more traditional learning strategies?

Do you have any additional comments?